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SPORTS

State champion Alex Lam, Dunavan Pulli put Winchester youth wrestling on New England map after top finishes

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

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Winchester youth wrestler Dunavan Pulli squares off against an opponent in the 67-pound weight class during the state finals at Gloucester on Feb. 28. Pulli ended up finishing fourth to secure a spot in the New England Regional Tournament last weekend in Fitchburg. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER RECREATION DEPARTMENT

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Behind every successful high school athletic department, there usually lies established youth sports organizations where athletes sign up via their parents to learn the nuances of the sport.

In Winchester, Coach Ryan Errico's high school wrestling program recently concluded another fine season that was filled with team and individual successes, and it appears that's not going to end anytime soon, thanks to the efforts of the Winchester Recreation Department, headed up by Nick Cacciolfi.

Cacciolfi has been the town's Rec Director since 2020. Two years later, he helped bring the town's youth wrestling program under the department's domain.

Left, Winchester youth wrestler Dunavan Pulli wears his medal proudly on the podium stand after finishing fourth in the 67-pound weight class while on the right Alex Lam gleefully holds up his U-12 state championship trophy from the podium stand. Both youth wrestlers won during the state meet in Gloucester on Feb. 28. COURTESY PHOTOS/WINCHESTER RECREATION DEPARTMENT

The program has averaged at least 30 youngsters each year, between the ages of 7 to 14, and they are all enthusiastic to learn the sport, w majority of them in the older U12-15 division.

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For Cacciolfi, an Athol native, being involved in wrestling has been a labor of love ever since he started competing in the sport as a high school athlete. He understands the program's success depends on everybody doing their job from the top on down.

"The Rec Department helps with the logistics, so that the coaches – Chris Nissen, Mark Pulli, Bridger Lord and Finn Paragas, a recent WHS graduate – can do their jobs to teach the sport," said Cacciolfi.

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The coaches conduct practices twice per week starting in November on the new mats at the Rec Department's Main Street facility. On this level, it's all about teaching technique, but there's also weekend competitions for the Winchester grapplers in the Northeast Regional League.

The group consists of 14 teams, including Winchester. Burlington, Cape Ann, Chelmsford, Haverhill, Melrose, Methuen, North Andover, Red Roots Youth, Tewksbury, Waltham, Westford, Woburn and River Rivals make up Winchester's opponents.

The older group of wrestlers eventually competes in the state sectionals to determine the top six qualifiers for the state finals in each weight class. At that point, hundreds of youth teams statewide come together to crown a champion, while the U-8 and U-10 wrestlers go directly to their state finals on Feb. 8.

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Alex Lam was a perfect 4-0 after coming up with two pins and two technical falls in a dominating performance. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER RECREATION DEPARTMENT

It all leads to the New England Regional Tournament, and that took place just last weekend, March 14 and 15, at Fitchburg's Game On Sports and Performance Center.

A total of five Winchester wrestlers – Omar Malik, Daniel Atkivan, captain Robbie Berling, Dunavan Pulli and Alex Lam – participated in the aforementioned state meet in Gloucester on Feb. 28 to determine the top six qualifiers in each weight class for those regionals.

"Omar, Daniel and Robbie came up short of qualifying," said coach Pulli, "while Dunavan, only a second-year wrestler, made it to the semifinals, before finishing fourth in the 67-pound weight class. But Alex then topped everybody to secure the U-12 state title at 74-pounds."

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With Coach Mark Pulli by his side, Winchester youth wrestler Alex Lam proudly poses with the U-12 state championship trophy that he earned after going 4-0 in the 74-pound weight class during the state meet in Gloucester on Feb. 28. COURTESY PHOTO/WINCHESTER RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Lam was a perfect 4-0 after coming up with two pins and two technical falls in a dominating performance. As a result, he took center stage on the podium stand. Dunavan also made it to the podium after his fourth-place finish.

Pulli then offered these thoughts on his two New England qualifiers.

“It was a good learning experience for both of them,” the coach said. “Alex battled hard against high caliber opponents, winning multiple matches to finish third, while Dunavan came up just short of placing. But together, they took huge steps this year to push our program forward.”

Joe McConnell is a longtime, award-winning sports editor for numero
Shore publications. He began covering Winchester sports for the News

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November 2024 and is currently its Sports Editor. He can be reached at editor@winchesternews.org.

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SPORTS

Winchester boys hockey celebrates another winning season at its annual awards night

It's been three weeks since the Winchester High boys hockey team (12-10-2, 17th seed) last suited up to play a game. It was against Catholic Memorial (19-3-1, top seed) in the Round of 16 on Feb. 28 at Allston's Warrior Ice Arena. The game was rather competitive throughout,

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR
March 24, 2026

SPORTS

Following successful season, Winchester boys basketball team reconvenes for awards

After three months of games and daily practices, the Winchester High boys basketball team was able to rack up 17 wins, while losing just five times, which included going 1-1 in the Division 1 state tournament. They ended up being eliminated by host Bridgewater-Raynham in the Sweet 16, 71-42 on

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March 21, 2026

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SPORTS

Winchester High wrestlers Napadow Baquero, Donlon complete scholastic careers on the mat with two wins each

The final and most prestigious high school wrestling tournament of the year is now in the books. Last weekend's All-New England Meet, held annually in Providence, R.I., marked the end of another year for the sport that started all the way back on the Monday after Thanksgiving. The

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR
March 13, 2026

SPORTS

Winchester High girls basketball rebounds with 13 wins, postseason appearance after winless campaign last year

Winchester High girls basketball coach Sam Mosley guided her team this year to a 13-8 regular season record that qualified them for the Division 1 state tournament as the 28th seed. The Red & Black then went on the road to face host South Community High School of Worcester (17-3)

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR
March 12, 2026

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Winchester ZBA waives town regulations to move Washington/Swanton project along

Town officials have approved waivers of regulations for a residential/commercial development project at Washington and Swanton streets. The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on March 19 approved the waivers for a 40B project at 278-292 Washington St. and 12 and 16-20 Swanton St. in a special meeting preceding a

NEIL ZOLOT | CORRESPONDENT

March 26, 2026

John Bellaire, 22, among youngest townwide winners in Winchester history

He won all eight precincts after a door-to-door campaign that emphasized direct voter contact over institutional backing.

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 25, 2026

EVENTS

Network for Social Justice to celebrate 35th anniversary

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: The Network For Social Justice turns 35 this spring! There will be a celebration on Saturday, April 11, from 7-9:30 p.m., at the Sons of Italy, 117 Swanton St., Winchester. Connect with your local friends and neighbors as

March 25, 2026

EVENTS

Winchester Community Music School presents Jazz Jam Session

The following was submitted by the Winchester Community Music School: On Saturday, March 28, join the community at Winchester Community Music School, 407 Highland Ave., for a Jazz Jam Session, an afternoon of fun, spontaneous jazz playing, beginning at 3 p.m. Instrumentalists and vocalists of all skill levels are

March 25, 2026

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